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The Common Call to Care: An Interfaith Analysis on Adoption and the Differing Legal Status of Orphans and Abandoned Children in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity

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Since almost all countries face difficult decisions regarding abandoned or orphaned children, many communities today must address issues of adoption and foster care. Adoption and foster care are also themes in three central world religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Although all three of these traditions affirm care of orphans and children in need, their views of adoption differ. The purpose of this paper is to present the precise similarities and differences regarding adoption and the legal status of orphans in today's Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities by analyzing the works of three prominent ethicists – Muslim scholar Jamila Bargach, Jewish scholar Michael J. Broyde, and Christian scholar Timothy P. Jackson. Each discusses the perspectives on adoption in his or her religious tradition and presents ideas for strengthening community support of children in contemporary societies. The paper finds that Islam rejects full legal adoption, Christianity affirms it, and Judaism argues for a form of “quasi-adoption” that honors both the adoptive and biological parents. Despite those differences, however, all three traditions can work together to care for the needs of orphans by encouraging open adoptions, honoring those who adopt, and affirming the rights of the child. By more clearly outlining these similarities and differences, the paper can strengthen interfaith initiatives and help all readers to reflect on the needs of children.

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